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Sen. Allen's Mackinac Bridge legislation approved by Senate committee

LANSING – Legislation introduced by state Sen. Jason Allen making an agreement reached by the Mackinac Bridge Authority and the administration into state law was approved by the Senate Committee on Transportation Tuesday.

“The Mackinac Bridge is the grand symbol of our great state,” said Allen, R- Traverse City. “We must do everything in our power to make sure the bridge is protected for generations to come.”

Allen's legislation mirrors an agreement which was signed by the governor, Michigan Department of Transportation Director Gloria Jeff and Mackinac Bridge Authority Chair William H. Gnodtke. Under the agreement, the MDOT director will defer to the judgment of the Mackinac Bridge Authority on all matters related to the traditional powers, duties, and functions of the MBA.

The bills would:

- Repeal the section of law that stipulates that the MBA will revert to Michigan Department of Transportation control once the bridge debt is paid, allowing the authority to retain control of decision making in perpetuity;
- Specify that the MBA is an autonomous entity within MDOT;
- Remove the stipulation that the state treasurer serve as treasurer of the MBA, allowing the authority to manage the finances of the bridge; and
- Outline the specific functions and responsibilities of the MBA.

Although the agreement between the authority and the administration fully restores power to the authority, the agreement needs to become statute to prevent possible future takeover attempts.

“While the governor has signed an agreement protecting the bridge in the short term, state law should clearly specify that the Mackinac Bridge Authority is responsible for management and operation of the bridge,” Allen said.

(More)

At a town hall meeting hosted by Allen earlier this fall, Jeff's decision to take away the decades-long responsibilities of the authority based on her interpretation of attorney general opinions from the 1960s was subject to harsh criticism from northern Michigan residents. This shift of power and subsequent outcry led to the recent agreement.

"In light of MDOT's actions over the summer and the more recent agreement, statutory clarification is needed in order to protect the long term interest of the Mackinac Bridge," said Allen. "President Ronald Reagan's message was 'trust, but verify.' That is what this legislation accomplishes."

Senate Bills 829 through 832 will now go to the full Senate for consideration. Similar legislation sponsored by Reps. Kevin Elsenheimer, R-Bellaire, and Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba was approved by a House Committee earlier today.

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Editor's note: A photo of Sen. Allen and St. Ignace Mayor Bruce Dodson will be available later today on the Web at: <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Allen/Allen.htm>